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BY MR. EDWIN HOLDER

(Acting Superintendent Madras School of Arts).

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RAM SINGH DEL. MAYO SCHOOL OF ART LAHORE

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MADRAS POTTERY.

By Mr. EDWIN HOLDER, Acting Superintendent Madras School of Arts.

PREFACE.

Every one who has been in Madras will, I feel sure, agree with me that as regards the present manufacture of pottery in South India, there is very little that is at all interesting. And were it not for the discovery of antique pottery in old tombs, and the existence at present of a few schools where the manufacture of pottery of a superior quality is taught, there would be literally no material for a Report of this nature, which it is intended should be comprised chiefly of illustrations.

The oldest records that I have been able to obtain of the discovery of antique pottery in Madras, are some letters and notes published in 1856 in *The Indian Journal of Art, Science and Manufacture;* and a short account in the Report of the Madras Exhibition of 1857. For further information and specimens I am deeply indebted to Mr. E. W. Stoney and Mr. J. R. Sandford, of the Madras Railway, who had themselves discovered large quantities of pottery in old graves.

For the short history of the potters of Madras I am indebted to Dr. J. Pulney-Andy, who, on a former occasion, very kindly contributed an account of the artisan class for my monograph on "The Brass and Copper Ware of Madras"; and for information regarding the present manufacture of pottery in various towns and villages of the Madras Presidency I am much indebted to the Collectors of the several Districts.

Edwin Holder.

I. ANTIQUE POTTERY FROM OLD TOMBS.

The ancient graves discovered in the Madras Presidency are described by various writers as cairns, cromlechs and tumuli, which differ from each other as regards construction and external appearance: some being raised above the ground, and others buried sometimes with only a large stone to mark the spot. The countless number of these primeval sepulchres affords matter for considerable amazement and doubt as to the age to which they belong; from cemeteries containing many hundreds to groups of five or six in a spot, they are thickly spread over the Southern districts. On the Mysore plateau and throughout Salem, Madura and Coimbatore, on the tops of mountains, in valleys and plains, in the middle of forests, among both dry and wet cultivation, by the side of rivers and tanks, and in fact in every description of country these remains of an unknown race abound. Their number and wide distribution in places now deserted, no less than in the cultivated tracts, would argue a population larger and more generally dispersed than the present. The Neilgherry and Koondah Mountains possess a peculiar kind of these ancient sepulchres not to be found on the plains, while the cairn of the low country does not occur on those hills; though there are many on the Shevaroys. The Pulney Hills are destitute of any kind of these remains, and so are Malabar, Canara, and generally the western coast.

The usual appearance of the cairn is that of a heap of stones surrounded by rings or circles of black fantastic rocks half buried in the ground. The tomb, which is underground below the heap of stones, is in the form of a rude box composed of four long slabs for the sides, bottom and top, and two short slabs for the ends. The contents of the tomb usually consist of pottery, human bones, personal ornaments, and iron implements.

Besides these stone cairns, another species of sepulchre is found in still greater abundance—namely, huge jars of coarse pottery (see No. 64), about three feet deep and two feet in diameter at the widest part, buried usually a foot below the surface of the ground, together with a number of smaller urns and *chatties*, which are generally placed mouth downwards. There is usually nothing to mark the spot where these are buried, though sometimes a single flat stone is placed on the top, but never surrounded with the circle of stones as in the case of the cairns. These huge jars are filled with earth, and contain at the bottom a quantity of bones broken small, and one or two smaller urns also containing fragments of bones and a kind of fine white sand quite different from the surrounding earth. It is supposed that these peculiar graves mark the resting places of the poorer classes, as do the great stone cairns those of the wealthier. Plate 64, fig. 1, shows the contents of one of this sort of graves, discovered near Mettapollium by Mr. J. R. Sandford.

The earthen vessels found in these old graves comprise not only urns, but jars, *chatties*, vase-shaped vessels with covers, shallow dishes, cups, and other similar utensils. Most of those shown in No. 63 are rounded at the

bottom or taper to a point. They were no doubt intended to be placed on the stands on which they are represented, and which are usually found together with them. The centre figure in No. 60 shows this more clearly by the difference of colour between the vessel and the stand on which it rests. A peculiar jar on four legs, which is decidedly characteristic of the simplicity of ancient forms, is shown in Nos. 61 and 64, fig. 1. This vessel was no doubt intended for some special purpose, as it is not so common as some of the other patterns.

Besides the great variety of forms there is also some difference in the colour of the various specimens of this ancient ware, but apparently very little as regards the quality of the material. The large vessels are usually of a plain red or buff colour, like ordinary unglazed earthenware; the smaller ones are sometimes of a fine polished black, but more frequently of a reddish brown ornamented with wavy lines of a lighter and brighter colour, and appear as though they had been overlaid with a thin transparent coating of red sealing-wax or shellac. The wavy line ornament has not been painted on the surface, but inlaid. This result was evidently obtained by scratching the surface of the unbaked ware with a toothed instrument resembling a comb, and then filling up the hollows with a lighter coloured clay than that used for the body of the vessel. The polish or gloss seen on the surface of most of these vessels is not really a glaze, as might at first be supposed, for on carefully examining the broken edges of some of the vessels, no thickness of glaze will be seen; and as narrow-mouthed vessels of this sort are polished only on the outside, it seems obvious to conjecture that this gloss was obtained by a process similar to some that are practised by native potters of the present day. The method most commonly known in Madras is that of rubbing the surface of the unbaked vessel with a species of seed or berry, worn as beads by the natives, thereby producing a polish which remains even after the vessel has been fired. Another method, as described by Dr. W. Hunter, is to rub the surface of the baked vessel with the juice of *Toothu* or *Abutilon Indicum*, a mucilaginous juice somewhat like gum, and then fire the vessel again. A kind of smear is thus produced which resists water and acids, though it can be easily scratched with a knife.

As regards purity of form, this ancient pottery far surpasses any of the same class now made in India; and by the great variety of its shapes, its decorations, and the quality of the ware, it bears a striking resemblance to some found in the old Etruscan and Roman tombs sketched by M. Brongniart in his famous work on Pottery. The tombs themselves are also similar to those discovered in Etruria, and undoubtedly belong to a prehistoric age.

II. MODERN MADRAS POTTERY.

The only kind of pottery which appears to be indigenous to South India is the coarse, unglazed earthenware manufacture in almost every town and village throughout Hindustan, comprising vessels for water, culinary utensils, tiles, flower pots, &c. These are made from almost any kind of clay procurable on the spot, which is neither properly ground nor tempered, but is used in its natural state by most of the native potters. No. 65 exhibits the utensils most ordinarily used in Madras by all the natives, particularly by the poorer classes, who cannot afford the luxury of brass and copper vessels. The colour of this coarse earthenware is usually a light red, as shown in No. 66, which exhibits a few other varieties of the same class of ware manufactured in the district of South Canara. The black specimens are sometimes made from a dark coloured clay which turns black when burnt; but most ordinarily from the same material as the red ware, the black colour being given by baking the articles in a gigantic jar with its mouth closed and plastered with clay. White, gray and buff pottery is manufactured in places where superior clay or kaolin can be obtained. A few specimens of white Arcot pottery and some Burmese ware are shown in No. 70. These also are unglazed, but are of a much finer material than the ordinary ware.

In describing glazed Indian pottery, Sir George Birdwood in his excellent manual entitled *The Industrial Arts of India*, particularly alludes to the glazed earthenware of Madura. Evidently this industry has declined considerably of late, for in South India at present there is no town or village to which the manufacture of glazed ware can be ascribed as an indigenous art. The only specimens of purely native manufacture that I have, till now, been able to procure in Madras, are some enamelled ballusters, *chillums* for smoking tobacco, &c., and jars. These are made in Arcot and about the town of Madras chiefly by Muhammadan potters, who very likely brought the recipes for enamelling earthenware from the North. The articles are not ornamented with designs in various colours, like the Multan and Bombay pottery, but merely enamelled with one colour throughout, chiefly a deep clear green made from copper, a subdued yellow like ochre, and various shades of brown—all more or less rich and transparent. There is not much demand for this enamelled ware, as the Hindus (who form the bulk of the population in Southern India) either prefer the ordinary cheap unglazed ware, which they can afford to change frequently; or the brass and copper ware, which is not only indestructible, but always retains its market value, according to weight and current price of the metal. As for ornaments, the house of an orthodox Hindu is without

even a vase or a flower pot. Hence the reason of the ceramic art never having been developed in South India, notwithstanding efforts made by the Government to improve the quality of the ware generally, by affording facilities for studying the art, as will be seen from the following account.

In 1850 Dr. W. Hunter, a most energetic English officer of the Indian Medical Service, started a drawing and engraving school, partly at his own expense; and in order to make the institution, in course of time, a self-supporting one, he opened in connection with it a pottery manufacturing department. In a short time Dr. Hunter succeeded in turning out some very fine specimens of terra-cotta ornaments for buildings, bricks, tiles, painted and glazed stoneware vases, gallipots, goglets, and a number of other useful articles. The Madras Government was not long in showing its appreciation of the public good done by Dr. Hunter. At first a liberal grant was allowed, and eventually the school was made a Government institution, and placed under the control of the Director of Public Instruction. Dr. Hunter continued to be in charge for some time, and on his retirement from the service was succeeded by Mr. R. F. Chisholm, who introduced many improvements in the manufacture of pottery, which in his capacity of Government Architect he had every opportunity of doing. Tiles and terra-cotta ornaments required for all the public buildings were supplied from the Madras School of Arts. As the demand for these articles increased rapidly, the Government considered it necessary to open another place exclusively for the manufacture of bricks and terra-cotta for public buildings, and in 1866 established a factory (not far from the School of Arts), which is known as the Government Brickfields. Since then the work in the pottery department of the School of Arts has been confined to the manufacture of superior ornamental and glazed ware, but more especially to the training of students in accordance with the main object of the institution, which is to afford sound instruction—both theoretical and practical—in the several arts and industries which are taught in it. English recipes and methods of work have been followed in the school as regards the manufacture of pottery, and some of the stoneware produced has been declared to be quite equal to the European articles sold in the market, both as regards quality of ware and finish.

The Native States of Travancore and Mysore have not been slow in following the example set by the Madras Government as regards the encouragement and spread of Technical Education. Schools of Art have been established in both places, and pottery is one of the industries taught in them, passed students from the Madras School of Arts having been employed as teachers. The glazed pottery of the Trevandrum School is equal to that turned out at the Madras School—if not better; the material certainly is whiter than any that can be obtained in Madras, and more closely resembles porcelain.

A word of praise is here due to the German missionaries, who have established a splendid factory at Mangalore. The roof tiles from that place are acknowledged to be the best in India.

Nos. 71, 72 and 73 illustrate the kind of pottery manufactured at the Madras School of Arts, and Nos. 74 and 75 the terra-cotta work executed at the Government Brickfields.

III. SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE MADRAS POTTERS AND THEIR WORK.

The potters of South India form one sect of the Hindus, called Kushavars, in Madras. It is supposed by themselves that they descended from a Brahmin father and Sudra mother, for the sacrificial earthen vessels, which are now made by them, were, according to the Vedas, intended to be made by the priests themselves. Some of the potters still wear the sacred thread, like the Kammalars or artisan class, in imitation of the Brahmins. This sacred thread is a thin cord, tied loosely across the body over the left shoulder and below the right arm. The potters are generally of the Sivite sect, they observe all the usual Hindu festivals and ceremonies, and do not permit the re-marriage of widows. They are generally illiterate, though some of their class have earned distinction as sound scholars, especially of late years. All their religious disputes are now settled by their own "Panchayats," and not referred, as of yore, to Brahmin priests. The women assist the men in their work, chiefly where delicacy of execution is needed. The wages of the potter vary according to age and sex, rather than according to ability. Women and boys earn from two to four annas a day, and men from six to twelve annas; a few earn as much as a rupee a day, but not more. On the whole, the potters are a poor class compared with the Kammalar class, which includes jewellers, metal-workers and wood-workers. Their occupation is, on that account, somewhat despised by the others.

The native potter's implements are few, and his mode of working very simple. In No. 67 is shown the potter's wheel, a clumsily constructed and defective apparatus. It is composed of several thin pliable pieces of wood or bamboo bent and tied together in the form of a wheel, about $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet in diameter. This is covered over thickly with clay mixed with goat's hair or any fibrous substance. The four spokes and the centre on which the vessel rests are of wood. The pivot is of hard wood or steel. The support for the wheel consists of a rounded

mass of clay and goat's hair, in which is imbedded a piece of hard wood or stone, with one or two slight depressions for the axle or pivot to move in. The wheel is set into motion first by the hand, and then spun rapidly by the aid of a long piece of bamboo, one end of which fits into a slight depression in the wheel, as shown in Nos. 67 and 68. The defects in the apparatus are—firstly, its size, which requires the potter to stoop over it in an uneasy attitude, as shown in No. 69; secondly, the irregularity of its speed, with a tendency to come to a standstill, and to wave or wabble in its motion; and thirdly, the time and labour expended in spinning the wheel afresh every time its speed begins to slacken. Notwithstanding, however, the rudeness of this implement, the native potters are expert at throwing, and some of their small wares are thin and delicate. One of the chief defects in the ordinary earthenware is the manner in which the bottoms of most of the *chatties* are finished off. The neck and upper part are first completed on the wheel; then the lower portion is cut off; and after partially drying in the sun, the bottom is reconstructed by tapping and drawing out with a wooden mallet and a round stone, the thick edges of the upper part of the vessel, until the orifice is closed. This is, no doubt, done with the object of toughening the bottom of large vessels intended to contain water; but the process is long and tedious, and the potter is not able to complete more than eight or nine *chatties* in a day.

The usual manner in which most of the Madras potters bake their wares is as follows:—A circular space about 10 feet in diameter is marked out on the ground in any convenient open spot. Small pieces of wood and dried sticks are spread over this space to a depth of about 6 inches, and a layer of "*bratties*," or dried cow-dung cakes, laid over the sticks. The vessels are then carefully piled on top of this platform of fuel to a height of about 5 or 6 feet, and the whole heap is covered over with straw and plastered over with clay, a few small openings being left here and there to allow the smoke to escape. These arrangements being completed, the fuel at the bottom is fired, and in the course of a few hours the process of baking is completed. At the Madras School of Arts, the Government Brickfields, and other manufactories where pottery of a superior quality is manufactured, regular kilns are used, constructed after the pattern of English and American furnaces; so also as regards the other tools and appliances. And the native potters who have had the advantage of seeing these, have effected some improvement in their own methods.

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60.—Antique Pottery from Old Tombs.

61.—Antique Pottery from Old Tombs.

Drawn by C. Gangadaren, Madras School of Arts.   Scale about ¼.

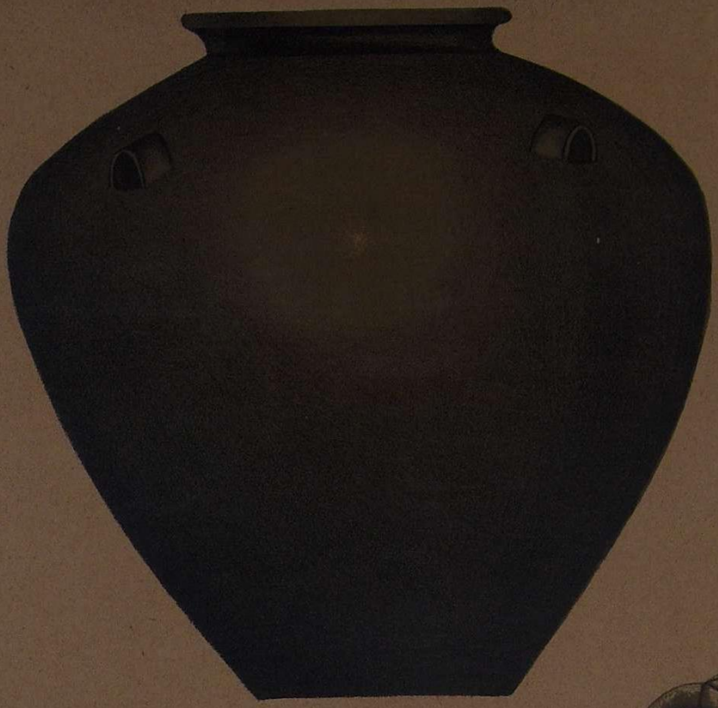
Drawn by P. Krishnaswamy, Madras School of Arts.

62.—Antique Pottery from Old Tombs.

K. Subbaiyar, pinxt., Madras School of Arts.

63.—Antique Pottery from Tombs at Coimbatore.

Facsimile of two pages from an old number of the "Indian Journal of Art, Science and Manufacture," published in 1856.



Malabar District.

Palavaram.

Found by T. R. Sandford, Esq. Coimbatore District. *From a photograph by E. W. Stoney, Esq.*

Coimbatore District.

Chingleput District.

64.—ANTIQUE POTTERY FROM OLD TOMBS.

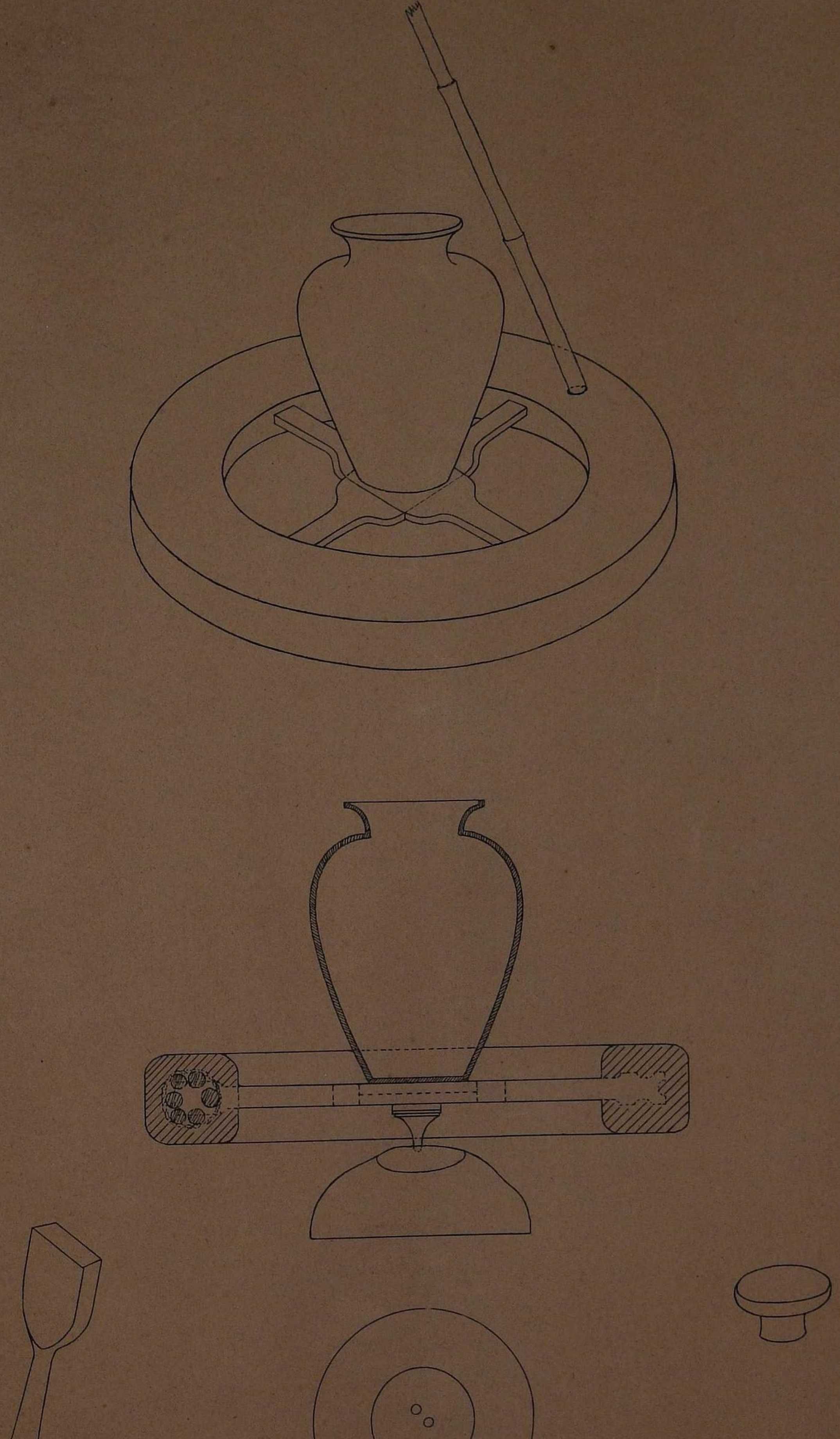
Drawn by P. Krishnaswamy, Madras School of Arts.

65.—Modern Madras Earthenware.

From a photograph by Messrs. Wiele & Klein, Madras.

66.—Earthenware from South Canara.

Drawn by P. Krishnaswamy, Madras School of Arts.



67.—The Native Potter's Wheel.

Drawn by P. Krishnaswamy, Madras School of Arts.

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From a photograph by Messrs. Wiele & Klein, Madras.

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MONUMENTS OF ANCIENT INDIA.

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